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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 02486

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
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SUBJECT: FALLOUT FROM SIDON

REF: BEIRUT 2456

¶1. C-ENTIRE TEXT.

¶2. CONFUSION CONTINUES ABOUT EXACT SITUATION IN VILLAGES EAST OF SIDON (REFTEL) WITH BEIRUT PARTIES PLAYING USUAL ROLES IN GREEK CHORUS ON SIDELINES. PALESTINIAN AND FUNDAMENTALIST MUSLIM FORCES APPARENTLY CONTINUE TO OCCUPY SEVEN CHRISTIAN TOWNS THEY SEIZED EAST OF SIDON. REPORTS FILTER IN ABOUT SOME 25,000 TO 75,000 CHRISTIAN REFUGEES FROM REGION FLEEING TO EITHER JEZZIN OR BEIRUT.

¶3. MEANWHILE, ESLEWHERE:

- ASL COMMANDER LAHAD REPORTEDLY ISSUED STATEMENT 26 APRIL THREATENING TO SHELL SIDON UNLESS PALESTINIANS AND MUSLIM MILITIA CEASE OFFENSIVE. HE ALSO IS QUOTED AS WARNING LAF AGAINST SENDING TROOPS TO JEZZIN "BEFORE BRINGING THE SECURITY SITUATION IN SIDON UNDER CONTROL AND FORCING THE PALESTINIANS BACK INTO THEIR CAMPS."

- PRESIDENT GEMAYEL TELEPHONED SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASSAD TO BRIEF HIM ON DEVELOPMENTS IN SIDON; TWO LEADERS AGREED TO KEEP IN TOUCH.

- CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS MET 26 FRIDAY AND DEPLORED SITUATION IN SIDON, CALLED ON FRIENDLY COUNTRIES ("PARTICULARLY SYRIA"), "ALL FREE NATIONS", AND POPE TO HELP. OTHER CHRISTIAN LEADERS, LED BY CAMILLE CHAMOUN, ISSUED SIMILAR STATEMENTS

- GEMAYEL, PARLIAMENT SPEAKER HUSSEINI, AND PM KARAMI MET 26 APRIL TO REVIEW SITUATION. KARAMI AFTER MEETING COMMENTED IN PART THAT RECENT ATTACKS IN SIDON WERE "REACTIONS WHICH EXPOSED OUR BROTHERS...TO WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO THEIR BROTHERS IN SIDON", COMMENT WHICH SPARKED SHARP CHRISTIAN REACTION AGAINST WHAT THEY VIEWED AS EXAMPLE OF KARAMI'S LACK OF CONCERN FOR CHRISTIANS WOES. REMAINDER OF KARAMI'S REMARKS AND THOSE OF HUSSEINI AND OTHER MUSLIM LEADERS WERE DUTIFULLY SOLEMN.

- SIDON DEPUTY NAZIH BIZRI ISSUED A STATEMENT CONGRATULATING THE INHABITANTS OF SIDON FOR THEIR, "VICTORY AGAINST THE LEBANESE FORCES AND THE AGENTS OF ISRAEL." ACCORDING TO BIZRI, "WHAT HAS COME TO PASS IS THE WORK OF SIDONIANS," NOT OF ARAFAT PALESTINIANS. HE CALLED THE EXODUS OF CHRISTIAN VILLAGERS AN "ISRAELI PLOT," AND CALLED ON THE REFUGEES TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES.

- JA'JA'S CALL FOR A GENERAL STRIKE IN EAST BEIRUT FOR APRIL 27 AS A PROTEST AGAINST SIDON EVENTS, A CALL IN WHICH THE PHALANGE PARTY JOINED 26 APRIL, HAS PROVED SUCCESSFUL, WITH ONLY OCCASIONAL GAS STATIONS, BAKERIES, MOM AND POP CORNER GROCERY STORES, PHARMACIES, AND SIDEWALK NEWSTANDS OPERATING.

- CHRISTIAN STUDENT DEMONSTRATORS 26 APRIL NUMBERING AN ESTIMATED 500 STUDENTS, MOSTLY FROM THE SOUTH, MARCHED ON THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE TO CRITICIZE THE FAILURE OF LAF TO DEPLOY TO PROTECT THE VILLAGES AFTER THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE LEBANESE FORCES. DELEGATIONS OF DEMONSTRATORS MET WITH LAF COMMANDER GENERAL A'OUN. THE ONLY

LAF REACTION THUS FAR HAS BEEN A CALL BY GENERAL A'OUN FOR LAF SOLDIERS IN THE SIDON REGION TO REPORT TO THEIR UNITS.

- ANOTHER DEMONSTRATION BY SOUTHERNERS RESIDING IN BEIRUT OCCURRED 26 APRIL ON THE AUTOSTRAD NORTHEAST OF THE CAPITAL, WITH DEMONSTRATORS BLOCKING ROADS, BURNING TIRES, AND FIRING IN THE AIR. OTHER DEMONSTRATIONS IN EAST BEIRUT ARE REPORTEDLY SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 27.

- APPARENTLY AS THE RESULT OF AMAL LEADER BARRI WORKING WITH CHRISTIAN LEADERS, AMAL HAS REPORTEDLY DEPLOYED IN STRENGTH OUTSIDE THE CHRISTIAN VILLAGE OF MAGHDUSHAH (POP. 8000) NEAR MIYAH MIYAH TO PROVIDE PROTECTION TO THE VILLAGE AGAINST ADVANCING PALESTINIAN/MUSLIM FORCES. MAGHDUSHAH REMAINS CALM AND SECURE 27 APRIL.

¶4. COMMENT. ESTIMATES OF NUMBERS OF REFUGEES APPEAR EXAGGERATED, AS DO LOCAL STORIES OF "PALESTINIAN HORDES LOOTING AND BURNING." NONETHELESS, THIS PERSPECTIVE REFLECTS DEEP CHRISTIAN ANXIETY OVER THE SIDON EVENTS. THE MAIN TARGETS FOR CHRISTIAN REACTION ARE LAF, FOR ITS FAILURE TO DEPLOY AS AGREED TO REPLACE DEPARTING LF FORCES, AND MUSLIM LEADERS FOR "FAILING TO KEEP THEIR WORD" TO PROTECT CHRISTIANS IN THE SOUTH AS AGREED ALSO AS THE PRICE OF LF PULLOUT. BARRI'S AMAL GETS GRUDGING CREDIT FOR DEPLOYING OUTSIDE MAGHDUSHAH.

¶5. LAF DEPLOYMENT AWAITS "POLITICAL COVER" WHICH A'OUN TRIES TO INSIST ON BEFORE ACTING. SATURDAY, APRIL 27, IS FULL OF MEETINGS, CONSULTATIONS, TRAVELS, ETC., TRYING TO SET UP BACKSTAGE ARRANGEMENTS WHICH WOULD PROVIDE SUCH COVER.

¶6. SOME CHRISTIANS INTERPRET THE ABSENCE OF "POLITICAL COVER" FOR LAF DEPLOYMENT AS A REFLECTION OF AN AGREEMENT TO COMPENSATE THE SUNNIS IN SIDON FOR WHAT THEY LOST IN WEST BEIRUT. THE MAIN WINNER THUS FAR, HOWEVER, APPEARS TO BE THE ARAFATI PLO, WHICH HAS EXPANDED ITS CONTROL AND STRENGTHENED ITS POSITION AROUND THE CAMPS, A RESULT WHICH PRESUMABLY WILL NOT WARM ASSAD'S HEART.

¶7. THE PHALANGE'S JOINING IN THE CALL FOR A GENERAL STRIKE IN PROTEST AGAINST THE SIDON EVENTS AND GOVERNMENT/LAF INACTION MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT TO PORTRAY BEIRUT DEMONSTRATIONS AS LF-INTIFIDA ALONE DEFENDING CHRISTIAN INTERESTS, BUT FASTER REACTION WOULD HAVE GAINED THEM MORE CREDIT. END COMMENT.

BARTHOLOMEW